



Congressman Ted Poe

2nd District of Texas



Education Task Force Bulletin

Dear Educators,

First and foremost, I want to thank you for the important role you play in shaping the minds of our future generation. For without you, our society would not be able make advancements and leaders would not be empowered to rise to the occasion.

Because I, like you, believe education is so important, one of my first acts as your representative was to form an Education Task Force (ETF) for the Second Congressional District.

I created the Task Force in order to get feedback from citizens who are concerned about education. I also wanted to hear from educators, those on the front lines every day, who could provide insight into the challenges they face on a regular basis.

As a result, I assembled a diverse group comprised of teachers, parents, school administrators, business leaders and citizens.

While the meetings were intense, the members of the Task Force took their roles very seriously and did an exceptional job. Because of the hard work and dedication of everyone involved, we came up with several practical solutions to some of today's most prominent education issues.

In this bulletin, I have included the latest ETF findings with information specific to our district. The programs outlined are Head Start, No Child Left Behind and Perkins Act Funding. This report should not only provide you with some insight into the workings of each one of these programs, but it will also shed some light on the concerns brought up by the community in the ETF forums.

Because of my continuing commitment to education, I will lead another Education Task Force. If you are interested in taking part in this important process, please contact my District Director Jessica Wellington at (281) 446-0242.

God and Texas,

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Member of Congress
TEXAS

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The 2005 Second Congressional District **Education Task Force**

As your Congressman, I would like to thank the dedicated members of my first Education Task Force. I sincerely appreciate your commitment to one of our great country's most important assets- our children.

Jimmy Simmons – President, Lamar University
Linda Gaudio - Director of Development, Memorial Hermann Foundation
Greg Hayman – Superintendent, Dayton ISD
Brent Hylton – Member, Liberty ISD School Board
Dr. Patty Shafer – Superintendent, Liberty ISD
Karen Perkins – Director of Development, Humble ISD
Mary Lou Schouweiler - School to Work Coordinator, Wunsche Academy, Spring ISD
Mark Hall - Board of Regents, Lee College/Baytown
Becky Hunt - Director of Career and Technology, Humble ISD
Paula Garrett - Parent
Lynn Fields – Member, Humble ISD School Board
Ted Mandel – Parent, Humble ISD
Kelly Bourquin - Teacher
Gary Stretcher - Vice President for Academic Affairs, Lamar State College/Port Arthur
Rachel Anne Hill - Teacher, Beaumont Central High School
Janet Orth - Assistant Superintendent for Instruction, Humble ISD
Scott Campbell – Superintendent, East Chambers ISD
Tillie Hickman – Principal, Odom Academy, Beaumont ISD
Brenda Dyken - Goose Creek CISD, Retired
Dr. W. Richard Hargrove - Associate Dean, College of Education and Human Development, Lamar University
Stephanie Flory - Manager of Human Resources, Spherion
Ken Schrader - Director of Special Programs, Humble ISD
Ed Moore - Retired Jefferson County Commissioner
Bessie Chisum - Chisum Resource Management, Jefferson County
Hollis Lowery-Moore - Dean, College of Education and Human Development, Lamar University
Carl R. Griffith - Jefferson County Judge
Jim Parsons - Executive Director of Assessment, Humble ISD
Stuart Salter - J. Salter Co.
Vicki Derese - Community Affairs Representative, Chevron Phillips Chemical
Doris Gill - Assistant to the City Manager, City of Port Arthur
J. Shane Howard - Senior Vice President, Community Insurance
Dr. David Teuscher - Beaumont Bone and Joint
Dyane Richards – Teacher, Parent, Humble ISD

The Head Start **Program**

Background

Initiated by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1964, the Head Start program was launched in 1965 to aid families in need at the federal level. In particular, the main focus of the program was to assist pre-school aged children and prepare them for entering kindergarten.

During its early years, the program was placed under the administration of the United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

The Issues

Over time, the program has been criticized for its attempts to provide too many diverse services instead of maintaining a focus on education.

Since the time of Head Start's creation, other programs have been developed that more adequately address the social needs of impoverished families. As a result, many agree that Head Start should become less involved in social services and concentrate more on educating younger students facing economic hardships.

ETF Suggestions

Head Start and the Department of Education

In order for Head Start to focus more on education, the ETF believes that it should be placed under the oversight of the Department of Education (DOE). This would allow the DOE to have direct authority over children not yet enrolled in school. Although this would add another level of bureaucracy to the program and provide another unfunded mandate to states

and their agencies, many feel this is a small price to pay.

Placing Head Start under the oversight of the DOE would also add a level of accountability the program currently lacks. Currently, Head Start is not subject to any official scrutiny. Consequently, all measures of success and accountability are based on internal self assessments that the program workers perform themselves.

Under DOE jurisdiction, however, the program would be held more accountable for its successes and/or failures. Integration of the program into the DOE would mean managed funding at both the federal and state level. This would also make the program directors subject to greater oversight and scrutiny if they wish to continue benefiting from current funding levels.

School District Management of Head Start Funds

Another solution suggested by the ETF allows each school district to manage its own Head Start funds. Advocates of this proposal claim each district is better suited to cater to the needs of its families rather than a federal or state program.

According to the ETF, school districts must have the flexibility to design programs tailored to their own students.

By allowing localized control, the ETF hopes an emphasis will be placed on students attaining a higher degree of education (bachelor's degree), a standard lacking in some current programs.

A Local Head Start Success Story

Humble Independent School District (HISD)

Currently in the Humble Independent School District (HISD), 66 families are

enrolled in the Head Start program with a cost of \$7,000 per student in 2005.

There are several criteria students must meet in order to enter into the program. These include living in the district, having a household income at or below the federal poverty line and the student's parents must be working or attending school.

The Head Start program in HISD is considered highly effective because it contributes to a 93 percent graduation rate of its participants. This success is based largely on the district's own concept for Head Start, rather than the institution of a cookie-cutter model from the state or federal government. HISD uses its own facilities for the program with no dollar match from state or federal government agencies.

HISD has proven that the Head Start program can be a success if a district implements a localized program that caters to the needs of its own students.

No Child Left Behind

Background

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act was approved with bipartisan support from the United States Congress and was signed into law by President George W. Bush in 2002.

NCLB's purpose is to ensure that all schools provide adequate levels of education for every student in America, thus leaving "no child behind."

Within this program, students are given an assessment test at different grade levels to ensure their education is providing them with the skills they need throughout their lives.

As mandated, if schools and/or school districts do not reach mandatory minimum

test scores set forth by the Department of Education (DOE), they could be in jeopardy of losing federal funding.

The NCLB assessment and accountability test was modeled after similar programs used throughout the country, but is largely based on the Texas Assessment Test formerly known as the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS).

The Issues

Much like the original test program in Texas, reforms are needed at the federal level to ensure NCLB provides the intended results. The ETF thinks that one of the key problems is the number of students schools are allowed to exempt from taking the test.

Currently, individual schools are only permitted to exempt 1 percent of their student population from the test. Due to this low percentage, schools seem to prefer to exempt children who are severely learning disabled or mentally handicapped as to not significantly impact their aggregate test scores.

A major reason for this action seems to be that these children do not perform or cannot perform at the same rate as other children on the same level. Supporters of the low exemption believe that if it were higher, schools may slide other lower performing, non-handicapped or learning disabled children into the percentage. Thus, allowing more children to "slide through the cracks."

The percentage of students with severe learning disabilities varies greatly from district to district. Schools with a greater percentage of students who are learning disabled are placed at a significant disadvantage. Due to the low exemption, schools no longer place an emphasis on providing funding for special education programs since the majority of children who would qualify for these programs are expected to perform at drastically higher levels.

Another concern raised by teachers and administrators is the large amount of time they spend preparing students to pass the state assessment test. Instead of being able to teach more creative subjects like art, music or literature, teachers are constantly spending time administering practice tests to ensure the main goal ratio of pass/fail is met and their school's funding is protected.

The ETF believes that students will begin to lack the creative thinking skills, due to the overwhelming focus school districts are placing on standardized testing.

ETF Suggestions

Adjustable Rate of Exemption

The ETF suggests an adjustable rate of exemption based on the percentage of students who qualify for special education programs. Schools with a larger percentage of students with learning disabilities would be given a larger percentage exemption. However, the number of students with learning disabilities would not be the same as the number of students who would be exempt. To address this specific point, the state of Texas has the State Developed Alternative Assessment (SDAA).

The SDAA is a special assessment test that is designed to diagnose students with learning disabilities. Those who are tested and qualify for special education programs have individual education plans (IEPs) that place students at the appropriate grade levels. This allows students to perform at their maximum level and ensures accountability without holding those who qualify for special education to the same standards as other students. Currently, NCLB does not have any provisions addressing or focusing on customized testing to determine students who are learning disabled.

Raise Exemption Level

The ETF suggests raising the current level

of exemption from 1 percent to between 3 and 5 percent. The current exemption level of 1 percent is unrealistic and does not support the demographics of most student populations.

Raising the exemption, would maintain accountability while providing schools with much needed relief. A higher exemption would also refocus school programs and allow special education classes to be offered to a greater number of students.

In order to sustain accountability and justify spending levels, the federal government currently believes that specific standards must be upheld. However, Congress agrees that compromises in the current system must be achieved for the sake of both educators and students.

Perkins Act Funding

Background

The Perkins Act provides much needed federal funding to high schools, colleges and universities to develop programs that focus on training students for a career in the modern workforce. These programs are designed to teach students valuable skills and provide hands-on training in various fields so that they develop an interest in a particular career or field of study. In 2004, out of 250,000 seniors in Texas, only 48,000 took advantage of these career preparation courses and programs.

The Issues

According to the ETF, one of the reasons for low participation in Perkins-funded classes is the focus schools place on students passing the state assessment test to comply with NCLB. Instead of allowing students the opportunity to explore career prep courses, administrators, educators and guidance counselors focus on assessment test prep classes. A major cause of concern voiced by educators is that if a student were to become

involved in career training instead of preparing for the test, the student may lose focus and fail to meet the minimum standards set forth by NCLB. Another concern of the ETF is the lack of communication between schools and parents about the benefits career prep classes can offer students.

ETF Suggestions

School District Communications Department

One solution proposed by the ETF would be the creation of a communications department in every school district with a school coordinator designee at every school. The communications department would provide a central distribution point for all information available to students on career prep programs. The office would then be tasked with distributing the information to parents on a regular basis.

Perkins and career prep advocates also believe that if the students were told at an early age that these classes were available, students may concentrate more on passing their tests, which could allow time for career prep or other elective courses.

Guidance Counselors Advise All Students

Another recommendation proposed by the ETF is to entrust school guidance counselors with the mission of advising all students, not just the students who “show promise” or who are “college bound.” It is the belief of the ETF that if students are better informed about the career prep programs at an earlier stage in their educational career, then that awareness may empower the student to be more focused, adding an incentive for meeting standards. All students, not just a select few, must be thought of and approached as though they are college or career bound.